

Be a Balladeer

ongs record stories. Sometimes they are history. Sometimes they are just tales worth remembering. In either case they are made more memorable by putting them to a tune.

Long before people in any culture developed writing as a way of recording stories, they used songs and **ballads** as a way of remembering events and passing them along. Singing the story helped people remember the details. The *Ballad of Davy Crockett* and the *Ballad of John Henry* are two well-known American stories remembered in song. The epic tales *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by the ancient Greek poet Homer are two of the oldest ballads or poems in Western culture.

A Time to Rhyme

The lyrics to many songs are actually poems. The last words in each line often rhyme, though the **rhyming pattern** can be different.

Here is an example of *abcb* pattern. Mary had a little lamb. a Its fleece was white as snow. b And everywhere that Mary went, c The lamb was sure to go. b

Here is an example of *aabccb* pattern.

Little Miss Muffet, a

Sat on a tuffet, a

Eating her curds and whey. b

There came a big spider, c

He sat down beside her c

And frightened Miss Muffet away. b

Another Memorable Song

Songs make it easy to remember what is said.
Find someone in your family or neighborhood who would have been your age in the 1960's. Ask them to sing the theme song from the hit TV show, "The Beverly Hillbillies." See if they get all the words. Then ask them how they can remember it after all these years. Chances are they'll say it's because of the tune, the cadence (that is the beat and pattern of emphasized syllables) and the rhyming that help make it a song. You may know this song yourself if you happen to watch re-runs on television. Sing along!

Theme from "The Beverly Hillbillies"

Come 'n listen to my story about a man named Jed, Poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed. And then one day he was shootin' at some food An' up through the ground came a bubblin' crude. Oil, that is! Black gold! Texas Tea!

The <u>tune</u>, the <u>cadence</u> and the <u>rhyme</u> make this story memorable, even years after having hearing it.

To do: Using the tune of *Yankee Doodle*, write a chorus and several versus that tell the story of the Overmountain Men of 1780. See page 2 for additional information and a worksheet.





The Beat Goes On

The cadence or beat of a poem (called **meter**) is what helps it fit with the beat of a tune.

Count the **syllables** in *Yankee Doodle* with a two-beat rhythm. Note the alternating strong (**bum**) and weak (bum) beats. Some syllables get two beats.

Yank-ee Dood-le went to town (a-)
bum bum bum bum bum bum bum bum
rid- ing on a pon- y (He)
bum bum bum bum bum bum bum bum
Stuck a feath-er in his cap and
bum bum bum bum bum bum bum
Called it mac- a- ron- i.
bum bum bum bum bum bum bum

History in Lyrics

Songs are used to recount historic events. In medieval times, troubadours would entertain the king's court by singing songs of victory and conquest. In a culture where few people could read and write, the song was an effective way of passing along history to new generations.

These lyrics are from a popular song written by Jimmy Driftwood around 1958. It tells one version of the story about Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans fought during the War of 1812. Does anyone know the tune?

The Battle of New Orleans

Well, in 18 and 14, we took a little trip Along with Colonel Jackson down the Mighty Mississip'. We took a little bacon and we took a little beans And we met the bloody British in the town of New Orleans.

We fired our guns and the British kept a comin'.
There wasn't nigh as many now as there was a while ago.
We fired once more and they began a runnin'
Down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico.

To do:

Using the pattern below, write some verses that tell about the Overmountain Men of 1780.

<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum
<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum
<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum
<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum	<u>bum</u>	bum

